

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TAIPEI 003677

SIPDIS

STATE PASS AIT/W

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/18/2014

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [TW](#)

SUBJECT: LY ELECTION PREVIEW: MIAOLI COUNTY

REF: TAIPEI 03646

Classified By: AIT Director Douglas Paal, Reason: 1.4 (B/D)

1. (C) Summary: Miaoli County (four seats), with its large Hakka population, has been a long-time Pan-Blue stronghold. Hoping to keep it that way, the Pan-Blue has nominated its three incumbents, and will run a campaign in which ethnic politics (likely masquerading as "local roots") will feature prominently. The DPP believes that its Hakka outreach efforts of the last few years might now bear fruit and help it unseat one of the KMT incumbents, Ho Chih-hui, who is embroiled in a corruption scandal that had him spending most of the last year in exile in Shanghai. If it is successful, the DPP hopes that this will usher in a new era for Miaoli politics, in which party identity and ideology will supplant ethnicity and factionalism as the most important electoral issues. Even if it fails, however, the DPP is all but guaranteed to hold onto its one seat. End Summary.

Miaoli: Majority Hakka and Staunchly Pan-Blue

2. (C) Miaoli County (pop. 560,597) in northwestern Taiwan is home to one of Taiwan's largest concentrations of ethnic Hakka. Hakka have traditionally been stalwart Pan-Blue supporters, and Miaoli is therefore considered a Pan-Blue stronghold. The Pan-Green currently holds only one of Miaoli's four seats in the Legislative Yuan (LY) and in the 2004 Presidential election, Miaoli residents voted for Lien Chan of the Kuomintang (KMT) over Chen Shui-bian of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) by a 21.5 percent margin. Despite these intimidating demographics, the Pan-Green has nominated three candidates for this December's LY election, hoping to wrest an additional seat or two from the Pan-Blue's three incumbents, who are all standing for reelection. Four independent candidates have also registered, but none is expected to be a serious contender.

Pan-Blue: A Time-Tested Formula

3. (C) Pan-Blue campaign organizers said they are confident the Pan-Blue incumbents can hold onto their three seats. KMT Miaoli County Chairman Lee Chin-sung said that the Pan-Blue is using a time-tested formula for success in Miaoli. The three Pan-Blue candidates, he explained, each represent one of the major geographical subdivisions of the county: the KMT's Liu Sheng-hung and Ho Chih-hui are from the coastal and mountain areas respectively, and Hsu Yao-chang of the People First Party (PFP) is from the Chunggang river area. Both Ho and Hsu are ethnic Hakkas, he added. The Pan-Green candidates, by contrast, are all ethnic Taiwanese from the coastal region, he said. The KMT will use its ethnic and geographic diversity to its advantage, Lee explained. Ho, for example, will emphasize the need to keep a representative from the mountain area in the LY as part of his campaign. KMT candidates will also campaign on their legislative record, he said, reminding voters of the construction and development projects they have brought to Miaoli. The PFP's Hsu will use a similar strategy, said PFP County Councilor Tsou Yu-mei.

SIPDIS

DPP: Not as Reckless as it Might Seem

4. (C) DPP Miaoli County Chairman Hsu Chin-jung defended the DPP's nomination strategy. The Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU) candidate, Chiu Te-hong, "doesn't stand a chance", he explained, so he should not count as a serious Pan-Green nominee. In fact, Chiu only recently left the KMT to join the TSU, he said, so he is just as likely to steal votes from KMT candidates as from the DPP's nominees. (Note: Chiu was a founding member of the "Blue Eagle Warriors," a group of young up-and-coming KMT members who in April urged the party leadership to admit defeat in the March presidential election, conduct a generational transfer of power, back comprehensive reform and shift the party's ideology toward the political center. He became increasingly critical of Lien Chan, at one point calling him a "lazy worm" to his face, and was expelled from the KMT in late July after accepting the TSU's nomination in Miaoli. End Note.)

15. (C) Hsu added that DPP nominee Chen Chao-ming can not be considered a newcomer because he previously served as an independent LY member from 1998-2001 and only narrowly lost his reelection bid in the last election. Furthermore, he predicted, the formerly independent Chen will attract many of his old supporters, and will not have to rely solely on loyal DPP voters. Hsu also downplayed the DPP's lack of geographical diversity, noting that although incumbent Tu Wen-ching is originally from the coastal area, he has lived in Miaoli City, located in the mountain area of the county, for the past 13 years and has proven himself to the local population by previously serving as a locally elected County Council-member.

Scandal Plagued Ho Chih-hui

16. (C) Hsu said the DPP "stands a good chance of taking two seats" in this election because of the controversy surrounding KMT nominee Ho Chih-hui. Ho fled to Shanghai in October 2003 to avoid an investigation into charges he had illegally used his position as County Magistrate in the mid-1990s to secure loans for himself. In May 2004 he was officially indicted on charges of corruption carrying a recommended sentence of 18 years imprisonment. He returned to Taiwan in September to vote on the "Truth Investigation Commission" bill authorizing an LY-appointed committee to investigate the circumstances of President Chen's March 19 shooting and its impact on the subsequent election. He also registered to become a member of the LY Judiciary Committee in a crass attempt, media and Pan-Green critics alleged, to influence his own case. Ho is currently protected by legislative immunity and cannot be arrested. If he wins election, Hsu predicted, he will drag the case out indefinitely or until the charges are dropped. If Ho loses, Hsu said, he will likely have friends smuggle him to Shanghai again despite a court order restricting him from leaving the country.

Ho's Supporters Abandoning Him

17. (C) Hsu said he was hopeful that many voters uneasy with Ho's "many flaws" will vote instead for one of the DPP candidates. The PFP's Tsou independently noted that many of the local community leaders who previously endorsed Ho are now supporting the DPP's Chen Chao-ming. Furthermore, Miaoli County Magistrate Fu Hsieh-peng (a PFP-leaning independent) has been attending the rallies of DPP candidate Tu Wen-ching in addition to those of the PFP's Hsu Yao-chang. KMT Organizational Development Committee Chairman Liao Feng-te speculated that Fu has thrown his support behind Tu because of a personal grudge he has with Ho. KMT County Chairman Lee acknowledged that Fu and Ho have had a less than friendly relationship since they ran against one another six years ago in a very negative campaign for County Magistrate. Both filed libel suits against one another at the time, he said, and one of these suits is still pending. However, Lee asserted that Fu's willingness to appear at Tu's rallies is not a snub directed toward Ho, but rather an effort to build good relations with both sides before his retirement. Deputy Magistrate Chen Hsiu-lung offered a similar explanation, saying "Fu wants to be friends with everybody now, so he wants to remain neutral." He added that Fu will attend any candidate's rallies, including Ho's, if he is asked to.

DPP Wants to Change Political Landscape in Miaoli

18. (C) DPP Chairman Hsu said he hoped that the DPP would be successful in getting both of its candidates elected because this would "forever change the political landscape in Miaoli" from one based on factional politics to one of party politics. Indeed, a striking feature of the campaign in Miaoli is the relative lack of attention given to the political parties. Campaign posters for both the PFP's Hsu and the KMT's Liu do not indicate their respective party affiliations at all. Even the DPP's normally very cohesive, party-centered campaign is notably absent in Miaoli. Its candidates are running independent campaigns and are reluctant to implement the party's trademark "peipiao" vote distribution scheme. DPP Chairman Hsu noted that the only way for his office nominally to comply with central party instructions to run a "team campaign" was for him personally to print up leaflets with photos and information about both candidates on the same page. He added that should peipiao become necessary in the end, the only way to implement it might be to have President Chen Shui-bian personally come down to Miaoli and call on voters to distribute their votes.

Factionalism and Ethnicity

19. (C) Instead of partisanship, factionalism and ethnicity are playing a much bigger role in Miaoli. KMT Chairman Lee asserted that the reason for DPP candidate Chen Chao-ming's

high level of support is because of his affiliation with the "Liu faction," which emerged after an internal KMT split over a County Magistrate election 40 years ago. The KMT's Ho is also in the "Liu faction", he said, so the willingness of some of Ho's supporters to back Chen instead is not very surprising. More prominent, however, are Miaoli's ethnic politics. The KMT and PFP are trying to mobilize the traditionally Pan-Blue Hakka vote by subtly playing up the Hakka ethnicity and local roots of their candidates Ho and Hsu.

DPP Reaches out to Hakkas

10. (C) However, the DPP's Tu is also actively courting the Hakka vote by emphasizing his long residence and service to the Hakka-dominated mountain areas of Miaoli and by minimizing references to his ethnic Taiwanese identity and membership in the DPP. Photos of ethnic Taiwanese Chen Shui-bian, for example, are conspicuously absent from his campaign posters and other materials. DPP County Chairman Hsu's office is also campaigning for the Hakka vote, reminding them of the party's efforts on their behalf in the last few years, such as the formation of the Hakka Affairs Council, promotion of Hakka-language education, the creation of a Hakka-language television channel, and other celebrations of Hakka culture (Reftel). Hsu said he is confident that a genuine appreciation among Hakka for the DPP's Hakka-friendly policies, combined with a sentiment among many Hakka that they should back the party in power to best gain influence, will result in a historically high turnout among Hakka for the DPP.

Comment: DPP Enjoys Room for Experimentation

11. (C) Miaoli represents a test for the DPP's efforts to expand from its roots as a party largely for ethnic Taiwanese into a genuinely multi-ethnic political party. They will need to attract some of the Hakka vote if they hope to take two seats. The KMT's decision to renominate a candidate as unattractive as the scandal-plagued Ho Chih-hui has made that task somewhat easier. In any case, the DPP has little to lose in Miaoli: they are virtually assured of keeping the one seat they have, as the Pan-Blue only nominated three candidates, and none of the independents poses a serious threat.

PAAL